



Seeing the Light: The Social Logic of Personal Discovery

Thomas DeGloma

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The chorus of the Christian hymn “Amazing Grace” reads, “I once was lost, but now am found, / Was blind but now I see.” Composed by a minister who formerly worked as a slave trader, the song expresses his experience of divine intervention that ultimately caused him to see the error of his ways. This theme of personal awakening is a feature of countless stories throughout history, where the “lost” and the “blind” are saved from darkness and despair by suddenly seeing the light.

In *Seeing the Light*, Thomas DeGloma explores such accounts of personal awakening, in stories that range from the discovery of a religious truth to remembering a childhood trauma to embracing a new sexual orientation. He reveals a common social pattern: When people discover a life-changing truth, they typically ally with a new community. Individuals then use these autobiographical stories to shape their stances on highly controversial issues such as childhood abuse, war and patriotism, political ideology, human sexuality, and religion. Thus, while such stories are seemingly very personal, they also have a distinctly social nature. Tracing a wide variety of narratives through nearly three thousand years of history, *Seeing the Light* uncovers the common threads of such stories and reveals the crucial, little-recognized social logic of personal discovery.

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